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Available online at: <http://ejournal.kopertais4.or.id/mataraman/index.php/efl> |P-ISSN: 2460-0938; E-ISSN: 2460-2604|**‘ARTISTIC INTEGRITY’ IN THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF
ABDELATIF LAABI’S NOVEL *LE FOND DE LA JARRE*****Khalid Majhad***kh.majhad@gmail.com*Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Hassan II Mohammedia-Casablanca University
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Abstract: The translation of literature has often been discussed and critiqued in terms of one core ideological question of cultural representation, namely in matters of exclusionary selection of certain texts or authors for translation and the discursive manipulation that goes with it. In this study, as the title suggests, the translation of the francophone Maghrebi novel into English is assessed on the basis of its faithfulness to the artistic spirit of the original text and to the distinctiveness of its author. This paper is mainly about ethics and esthetics in postcolonial literary translation and treats questions of rigour and faithfulness in emphasizing the aesthetic potential of postcolonial literatures and in showing the individualism of each author, besides mere extraction of ethnographic knowledge. Artistic integrity, implying both completeness and principled professional practice, is measured according to a framework developed by Chinese translation scholar Jin Di (2003) and a related one by Boase-Beier (2010) on the application of cognitive stylistics to translation assessment. Faithful style reproduction in the target text is taken here to be the principal indicator of translational artistic integrity since style is the element that captures the ‘spirit’ and literariness of the literary work. Ignoring it is a form of injustice and a sign of sloppiness in dealing with minor literatures from the ‘Third World’. The paper assesses the English translation of *Le fond de la jarre* by Moroccan author Abdelatif Laabi.

Keywords – Francophone Maghrebi novel, Literary translation assessment, Artistic Integrity, Cognitive stylistics, Abdelatif Laabi

INTRODUCTION

The Rise of Francophone Maghrebi Literature

Francophone Maghrebi literature owes its continued existence on today's literary scene to numerous distinguishing characteristics. It is most importantly 'une littérature engagée', a committed literature, responsive to the concerns of the Maghrebian people. The Maghrebi novel, a most popular genre, has in large part been presented as a commentary on lived realities in colonial and postcolonial times, to the extent that many would argue that the novel with its minute cultural details is the best place for one to discover and rediscover the Maghreb. Writing was then supposed to contribute to a 'nationalisme culturel' (Khatibi, 1968), enabling the recording of the history and culture of colonised nations and militating for their independence. Mohammed Zniher (1965) makes a statement that says it all about the role incumbent upon the author.

'Si l'écrivain doit écrire pour son public, il doit nécessairement traiter des questions qui intéressent ce public. l'œuvre s'attachera à garder toujours un lien étroit avec le milieu social dans lequel est produite. Elle doit exprimer les réalités profondes d'un peuple. C'est à cette seule condition que l'écrivain pourra contribuer efficacement à une œuvre nationale et de rénovation... pour être révolutionnaire, notre culture doit être nationale... si un dirigisme devait un jour s'instaurer dans ce domaine, c'est dans ce sens-là qu'il devrait s'exercer. Cette liberté qui doit s'inscrire dans ce cadre national, révolutionnaire, seul l'écrivain engagé dans le sens de l'histoire peut véritablement l'assumer'.

(as cited in Khatibi, 1968, p. 15)

According to the statement, the Maghrebi author has three major responsibilities to fulfill. He should first and foremost be an 'écrivain engagé' [a committed writer] closely connected with the day-to-day matters preoccupying his people. His very act of writing is a 'témoignage', a testimony that 'retrieves Maghrebian history and culture from erasure' (Kelly, 2005, p.5). This call reflected the rising intellectual consciousness of the colonial threat that was to efface the histories of colonized nations if the nationals had not striven to record them. Additionally, because the novel is a portrayal of the world, authors, in technical terms, tend to look at matters from the vantage point of the omnipresent analyst, delving critically into the inner complexities and paradoxes of situations. This is a second role implied by the statement that the author has an assumed potential to instigate what Khatibi terms a constructive 'double critique' not only of the Western colonizing dynamics, but also of the local institutional paradigms and culture (Woodhull, 1993, P.9). The

colonial situation of the Maghreb and its geographical closeness to Europe are significant factors in the formation of the Maghrebi cultural identity. The identitarian split has been a frequently addressed issue in several Maghrebi novels. Authors have had to adhere to and promote a coherent nationalistic discourse celebrating the Maghrebian pluralistic identity. A sheer number of Maghrebi novels are autobiographical or semi-autobiographical, with their authors presenting themselves as protagonists affected by the same worldly issues besetting the region and the people. Kelly (2005) wrote in line with Zniber that autobiographical authors 'engage not only with their own personal histories, but also with the collective histories of North Africa and of Europe (p.1). This has also been true of the female writers who have spared no effort to call attention to the conditions of Maghrebi women as victims of a 'double colonialism': The burden of patriarchy inside and formal colonialism outside. Dissidence is a further intellectual quality presupposed on the part of the author to slam the frustrating political and social transitions in post-independence Maghreb.

With these particularities, Francophone Maghrebi literature has been elevated to a status of political discourse [...], emblematic of a 'sense of identity relevant to both society and the individual' (Laroussi, 2003), p. 81). This is a case of novelistic artistry coming to be deployed at the service of the nationalistic and political cause. Retaliation through writing back in French was a strategic choice according to renowned Kateb Yacine, who contended that the French language is 'un butin de guerre' ('the Algerians' spoil of the war for independence') (Cela, 2014, p. 229). and so could be used to the Algerians' own advantage in making the anti-colonial voices heard by a wider international audience.

Among the different literary genres, the novel had been preferred for its quality of being more accessible to a wider readership that could straightforwardly identify with the vividness of the narratives. Since its early beginnings in around the 1920s, the francophone Mghrebi novel has verbalized the echoes of a life under colonization and after it. It initially started out as a mode of ethnography sending details about the Maghrebi life and culture to sympathizers from the French political left, who at the time pledged support for the cause of independence. Khatibi (1968) attests that the early novels did actually show to the world 'que les sociétés colonisées ne sortaient pas du néant, qu'elles étaient dotées de valeurs authentiques et d'une véritable culture'[that colonised societies did not come out of nowhere and that they too have an authentic culture of their own] (P.9).

Every Maghrebi novel you take is definitely either directly or indirectly a collective story, or using the term in Irele (2009), a 'national allegory', attesting to the people's common aspirations and disillusionments between two histories: the colonial and the

postcolonial. In a more telling statement about the role played by Maghrebi novelists in writing their history, Aresu (1998), emphasized that ‘the [previously] silenced, and suffering people found powerful voices in a generation of novelists such as Mouloud Feraoun, Mouloud Mammeri, and Albert Memmi, etc., who began writing their own histories from a simultaneously social, political, and autobiographical perspective, thus establishing a North African tradition of nationalistic fiction’ (105). Many would even rightly contend that Maghrebi novels are mostly autobiographies that one can read as ethnographical texts. Kelly (2005) shares a similar view but goes so far as to suggest that autobiographies in the case of Maghrebi novels are constituents of a coherent anti-colonial discourse, and one could even argue that it is actually the political agenda openly voiced by Maghrebi authors that has led Western readers to ignore the ‘aesthetic potential’ of Maghrebi literature (p.4).

Bensmaia (2004) makes the interesting observation that what distinguishes these authors is that they ‘have all succeeded in showing that this *literature carries a message beyond mere revolt*, all the while insisting that it is the product of an iniquitous historical situation. What the works of these writers prove is that *Maghrebi literature exists* (p.5) [italics mine]. In other words, it is thanks to this generation of authors that the Maghreb has had a distinct literary tradition of its own, a literature that offers ‘allegories of struggles and contradictions in the Maghrebi societies (Lowe, 1993, p. 44).

The continued life of the francophone Maghrebi novel is artistically deserved as well. The Maghrebi writers have developed a novel writing style in French with a distinguishable “code métissé” or a ‘third code’ (Bandia, 2012 p. 356) that defies and blurs the borderlines between languages. They have managed to experiment with the French language in such a manner that they have lent it a local feel and made it speak well for the Maghrebi culture. The European language text comes to host ‘indigenous language words and expressions, even pidgins and creoles’.

The writers have attempted to transmit the ideals of their native culture to the foreign reader. Bandia (2012) draws an analogy between writing of this sort and intercultural translation. She joins Tymoczko (1998) in her view that postcolonial writers use their cultures ‘as background to their literary works’ (Bandia, 2012, p. 355). Moroccan writer Tahar Ben Jelloun, irrespective of the harsh criticism leveled at him, has used French to portray his native Islamic and Moroccan society, ‘thereby “translating” it for the French reader (Shamma, 2009, p. 190). Of much interest is also the fact that Ben Jelloun’s tendency towards a writing style characterized by much “bilingualism or translingualism”

allows for a situation where ‘two languages clash, interact, and translate each other’ inside the single text (p. 190).

In terms of the politics of writing, so to speak, Frantz Fanon stated that the ‘obligation historique’ of African writers’ to write in one of the colonial languages instead of their indigenous languages has paradoxically constituted a drive to ‘Africanize and indigenize the colonial languages’ (Bandia, 2003, p. 135), and consequently lead to ‘a disruption of the [homogenizing] *fluency* of the European language text and a deliberate violation of the linguistic and aesthetic norms of the receptor colonial language’ (p.137). The European language is itself *othered* in order to ‘retain the foreignness of the African culture in a process of translation as representation’ (p.139).

A related study (Toler, 2001) raises several cogent questions about the way francophone Maghrebi authors are received in the west. It was found out that many translators and/or publishers of Maghrebi novels present their translated works not as works of art, but as ethnographic glimpses into the mind and culture of the 'Other'. Toler attests that:

As such, many (perhaps even most) published translations indicate that the translators have taken considerable liberty with the source texts, failing to devote adequate attention to, or even purging, the original of many of its most important literary and stylistic merits. Often this neglect has implications that reach far beyond simple aesthetic considerations. (p. 50)

Toler’s assessment was concerned in the main with the rendition of the ‘hybrid’ character intrinsic to the plurilingual and pluricultural make-up of the Maghrebi novel. He sees that many English translations erroneously standardized the source text. Francophone author’s indigenized mode of writing is a mark of ‘resistance to appropriation into standard French’. That ‘must not be appropriated into English, either’ (p. 62).

Studying many of the works of prominent Algerian novelist Assia Djébar, Toler (2001) makes the interesting observation about her capacity for resistance through their subversion of the coloniser’s language. He notes that ‘Maghribi authors often seek to ‘foreignise’ French, both in order to ‘make the language their own’, and in order to undermine the authority of the coloniser’s linguistic paradigm’ (p. 52).

In more technical terms, Toler (2001) observes that Djébar’s writing is ‘rather unorthodox in its style and syntax’ in that.

Some sentences may only be fragments, others link clause after clause in long flowing sentences full of detours and elaborations and more detours. She also manipulates the syntax of her sentences to produce a text that is somewhat antagonistic toward the stylistic expectations of the francophone reader. For example, occasionally she inverts the standard subject-verb-object sequence in her sentences to bring some element in a sentence to the forefront. (p. 63).

He therefore insists that ‘this physical placement’ is significant in placing emphasis on certain ideas and that this emphasis may be ‘lost when conventional syntax is restored’ (p. 63). Djebbar seems to join her compatriot Kateb Yacine in his use of the French language ‘pour dire aux français qu’ils ne sont pas français’.

On another note about author individualism, Parks (2007) maintains that a literary writer is by definition a ‘rebel’ who, by means of his unique style, voices a certain view on reality, and it is that very sense of individuality which they want to see reproduced clearly in whatever language and whatever part of the globe their books appear (p. 240). Style for Parks is absolute; you take it or leave it. If it is lost in translation, ‘then, the author is lost too, the individual vision is lost’ (p. 240). Literary translation is, after all, ‘the art of vivifying the author’s creative imagination in another language’ (Di, 2003, p. 89). Parks warns against a translator’s temptation impose ‘a uniform, belle- lettres style on the text to translate’ (p. 235).

Towards a Framework of Quality Assessment: Artistic Integrity and Ethical Rigor

There is as of now no unanimously agreed definition of what a ‘good’ translation would definitely look like. In this study, no such definition is claimed. Rather, a clear perspective is adopted for judging a ‘good’ translation. This framework is based on the work of two geographically distant but theoretically related scholars Chinese Jin Di (2003) and German Boase-Beier (2010). Jin Di theorizes about ‘Artistic Integrity’ in translation. His theory is often compared and contrasted with Nida’s (1964) popular theory of dynamic equivalence which stipulates a reader-oriented approach to translation. Though initially inspired by Nida, Jin Di (2003) finds fault with the inherently subjective nature of readers’ response, and suggests instead that translation assessment be based on the rather objective notion of ‘equivalent effect’, which a translator achieves by concentrating more on the source text than on hunting for an uncertain response from the target reader. That is to say that Jin is ‘unwilling to sacrifice the content for the intelligibility of the translated text to the average target reader’ (Hui-juan, 2007, p. 101). Equivalent effect is based upon a

‘three-character’ principle of faithfulness: ‘faithful representation of the fundamental facts, transference of effect (artistic imagery) and reproduction of artistic style (the spirit) respectively’ (p.99). Jin presents his theory as being ‘text-oriented’ rather than ‘reader-oriented’ as with Nida. Hui-juan (2007) considers that Jin’s major critique of Nida’s theory concerns its exclusive interest in meaning and its failure ‘to address the issue of transference of aesthetic elements’ namely the transference of style, and this makes its application less adequate for literary translation (p. 106). Artistic Integrity is thus said to be attained when a translator moves beyond word-for-word or sense-for-sense solutions and seeks to regenerate the effect of message. The concept of ‘the message’ is of paramount importance since it is ‘more than information. It covers not only the substance of the communication, but also the manner, the tone, and the subtleties that help the communication to produce its desired effect [emphasis mine] (Di, 2003, p.52).

Style is by far a key component in the making up of a literary work and a basic criterion for quality assessment since it is the element that captures the ‘spirit’ and literariness. Faithful style reproduction in the target text is viewed as the principal indicator of translational artistic integrity. Ignoring it is a form of injustice and a sign of sloppiness in dealing with minor literatures from the ‘Third World’.

Boase-Beier (2010), one of the few researchers who have advocated a stylistic approach to translation assessment, maintains that style ‘provides clues to a state of mind’ (p.41). The meaning of this is that ‘by attempting to reconstruct the style of a text, the translator is attempting to reconstruct states of mind and thought processes, always with the awareness that individual states of mind are affected by social and cultural influences’ (p.54). In this sense, faithfulness to style is essentially faithfulness to the genius or spirit of the literary work and through it to the language and culture it comes from.

This is to argue that translation proper is one that is sensitive to the essence of the source literary text, namely to its style- ‘its formal linguistic characteristics, its contribution to what the text means, and the interplay between universal stylistic possibilities (such as metaphor or ambiguity) and those rooted in a particular language’ (Boase-Beier, 2010, p.58). This said, Gutt (2010) insists that ‘faithfulness in matters not only of content but also of style is demanded’ and so considers that a direct translation type works best in the case of literary translation since it reestablishes ‘the relationship between features of style, as “communicative clues” and the meanings to which these clues point’. He admits, however, that though ‘direct translation can be more difficult for the reader to

process than indirect, it will provide more cognitive or emotional effects, and will therefore be more rewarding' (as cited in Boase-Beier, 2010, p.59).

METHOD

Central to Di's evaluative model is that a successful study of a literary text for the purpose of its translation starts with a 'penetration' step, whereby the analyst, be he a reader or translator, 'enters the linguistic and cultural environment of the source text [...and] develops a 'sensitivity' to the words, their structures and associated concepts' (Di, 2003, p55). In our case, this step is made easier as plenty of serious critical work has been done on the francophone Maghebi novel by Francophone critics across the world. This study will draw on preexisting critical studies, mostly in French, and these will be supplemented with personal close readings for insights about the literary and stylistic characteristics of the source and target versions of the novels under analysis. Following this comes an 'acquisition' move whereby the analyst attempts to gradually appreciate the various aspects of the 'message', that is its spirit, substance and flavor' (p54).

Once the message has been acquired, the translator begins an 'empathetic re-creation: creating new imagery that may carry the closest possible message in the new environment' (p.84). This involves finding 'natural ways' of expression with which native speakers communicate with each other' (p85). Di asserts that a key to the success in the transition move is 'freeing oneself from the interference of the foreign language' (p85). However, the translator is supposed to 'be jealous of the form of the original which, according to Gombrich (1981), 'modifies, refines and articulates thought' (cited in Di, 2003, p85). Transition is mainly concerned with the 'genius', naturalness, of the target language. The final move is 'presentation'. At this point the translator presents to his target readers the 'final message' which, he believes, would produce an effect that approximates as closely as possible the effect the original message had on source text readers (p54).

Many would ask why one is supposed to know these covert moves if the purpose is to assess the end product. The answer is simply that these moves are linked to one another in a 'domino effect' relationship; that is if either move is mishandled the whole end product will lose appeal.

The assessment following the artistic integrity model considers that instances of weak translations are indicative of some mishandling of one or more of the four 'moves' proposed by the model. A typology of mistranslations will be established alongside their potential root causes with regard to requirements of the four moves. For example,

translators who are not familiar with the historical and cultural specificities of the Maghreb and who do not attempt a full penetration into this milieu will likely fail to understand the bilingualism and even multilingualism characterizing the writing style of many Maghrebi authors. The end product might eventually be a failed 'standardized' version that misses the point about the distinctiveness of Maghrebian literature. Similarly, if in certain cases ambiguity is an intended idea of an author, then a translator needs to be well informed about its non-gratuitous presence. The passages will be organized in parallel corpora with aligned focus portions for ease of retrieval.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Assessment of the English translation *Le fond de la jarre* by Abdelatif Laabi

Contextualizing remarks:

Author profile

Poet and novelist Abdelatif Laâbi is best known for being the founder and editor of *Souffles* (Breaths), the most influential literary and political journal in the Maghreb in the 1960s and early 1970s. This journal ceased to exist when Laâbi was imprisoned in 1972 for his political activities. His eight years in prison were described in his poem *Le Règne de Barbarie* (The Reign of Cruelty) in 1979. Laâbi explores the dilemma of the relationship between the intellectual and the state, a dilemma which faces all writers from impoverished and despotic societies (Abdeljaouad, 2003, p.387).

In addition to Laabi's insinuated as well as outspoken political attitudes intrinsic to all his writings, Laabi recounts with utmost precision 'la vie quotidienne avec ses rituels familiaux, ses fêtes, ses menus ordinaires et extraordinaires, les boutades de la mère, les réflexions du père, les proverbes et dictons qui colorent leur discours ainsi que ceux des voisins, des artisans et du petit peuple de Fès' (Devergnas, 2003, n.p.)

A marker of Laabi's individualism as an established author is his peculiar manner of making the French language accommodate and smoothly express Moroccan thought, and simultaneously enables the Moroccan dialect to shine through. Laabi is aware of his excessive tendency towards orality while writing and that is clearly recognized throughout the novel studied here *Italics*.

Notes on the Novel

Le fond de la jarre is an autobiographical novel portraying from a child's perspective Moroccan life during the transitional period from colonialism into independence. The novel is set in Fez, the city we discover as we read its 'mille secrets and

‘des petits et grands événements qui ont modelé sa sensibilité de futur poète et écrivain militant’ (Devergnas, 2003, n.p). In moving from one setting and event to the next, readers gradually perceive a young boy’s growing into maturity and political consciousness.

In an interview posted on Youtube on June 15, 2010, Laabi speaks of his own style and he validated my observation about the marked presence of orality in his writing. Remarkably, *Le fond de la jarre*, though written in French, reads as a pure Moroccan text, with idioms, slang phrases and proverbs literally worded in French, sometimes to an excessive extent, breaking as a result a common practice of seeking semantically equivalent culture-bound idiomatic expressions in the target language. In so doing, Laabi presents the French reader with an unabridged picture of Moroccan thought as verbalized through the Moroccan dialect whose spirit survives in the French text. Orality as a stylistic characteristic of Laabi’s writing has to be maintained in any translation that is to be judged as fair or possessing artistic integrity.

About the translating body

Many-award winning poet and literary translator André Naffis-Sahely is credited with the translation into English of a number French and francophone novels and poem collections. Bicultural by birth to an Iranian father and Italian mother, and with his constant moves to live in new societies, Naffis-Sahely has to have developed a necessary translator quality of openness to and appreciation of different cultures. He also writes fiction and poetry reviews for *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The Independent* and *Banipal*.

As part of his involvement with a number of intercultural programs in countries such as the USA and France, Naffis-Sahely has collaborated with a number of international publishing houses interested in francophone literature. His translation of Abdellatif Laabi’s novel *The bottom of the jar* was published by Archipelago Books, a US-based non-profit press which, according to statistics in its website, has translated over 120 books from more than thirty languages. Its manifesto states that translating more literature ‘can act as a catalyst to dissolve stereotypes and to reveal a common humanity between people of different nationalities, cultures, and backgrounds’. So, ‘by publishing diverse and innovative literary translations, [...] we can broaden the American literary landscape’ (<https://archipelagobooks.org/>, 2017, September 30).

Assessment

The predominance of orality in this novel, in much the same way as other language mixing strategies common to francophone Maghrebi writers, has to be regarded in light of a general authorial tendency to appropriate the colonial language and force it to recognize and accommodate the indigenous language and culture. By its nature, a society's orality is its most authentic mode of expressing itself. A translator may be adept at dealing with standardized written codes with the help of dictionaries. In contrast, knowledge of the meanings and connotations of everyday oral language uses is only possible if a translator wholeheartedly 'penetrates' the source environment. Technically speaking, Di means by penetration that a translator 'operates with source-language concepts, thinks in that language, bars the interference of his own language, and eventually develops a 'sensitivity' to the words, their structures and associated concepts' (p55).

The table below demonstrates parallel versions of some passages pregnant with typical oral formula in the Moroccan dialect in Laabi's novel.

Original French Text	English Translation
'Maintenant que le ventre est plein, il peut dire á la tête: Chante' ' (Le fond de la jarre, p. 86).	"Well, what are you waiting for? Now that your belly is full, you can let your hair down!" (The bottom of the jar, p. 61).
'Je vais vous montrer le henné de mes mains' (Le fond de la jarre, p. 99).	Very well then, I'll show you the henna on my hands. (The bottom of the jar, p.69).
La fin de monseigneur Ramadan' (Le fond de la jarre, p. 142).	The end of the holy month of Ramadan (The bottom of the jar, p.98).
'j'ai besoin de refroidir mes djinns' (Le fond de la jarre, p. 152).	I need to 'chill my jinn' and so I'm going to a Gnaoua hadra." (The bottom of the jar, p.104).
'elle decide tout á trac de ne pas mettre dans l'eau... écouter á mes os' (Le fond de la jarre, p. 172).	Ghita...deciding "not to get her hands dirty," [...I have the right to sit and scratch my head and 'heed my bones.' (The bottom of the jar, p.119).
'le pain commence á avoir faim' (Le fond de la jarre, p. 180).	"Tell a baker his dough has fallen and you'll get a rise out of him." (The bottom of the jar, p.125).
'c'est un poulet cuit á la vapeur et servi avec son cumin' (Le fond de la jarre, p. 241).	"It's a steamed chicken served with its own cumin," Driss exulted (The bottom of the jar, p.165).

By virtue of his translation of many of Laabi's works, Naffis-Sahely shows in the translations above a high degree of familiarity with what Laabi intends to communicate as an intellectual speaking in the manner of a typical Moroccan.

According to the framework advocated here for the assessment of the quality of translation, this orality dimension should for no reason be undermined. The uninformed translator will be at fault if he does not recognize the significance of the presence of orality in the novel. Artistic integrity is about resisting the temptation in such a situation to 'standardize' the English text and present it in a 'naturalized' form.

Looking at the English version in the table above, it is clear that in dealing with Moroccan-specific idioms and slang expressions the translator tends to oscillate between literal, word-for-word, translations as in:

'Je vais vous montrer le henné de mes mains'
Very well then, I'll show you the henna on my hands.

'j'ai besoin de refroidir mes djinns'
I need to 'chill my jinn' and so I'm going to a Gnaoua hadra."

'c'est un poulet cuit à la vapeur et servi avec son cumin'
"It's a steamed chicken served with its own cumin,"

**[...] I have the right to sit and scratch my
 head and 'heed my bones.'**

and semantically equivalent expressions in the target language, though in different wording sometimes as in:

'Maintenant que le ventre est plein, il peut dire à la tête: Chante'
"Well, what are you waiting for? Now that your belly is full, you can let your hair down!"

La fin de monseigneur Ramadan'
The end of the holy month of Ramadan

'elle decide tout à trac de ne pas mettre dans l'eau... écouter à mes os'
Ghita...deciding "not to get her hands dirty,"

'le pain commence à avoir faim'
"Tell a baker his dough has fallen and you'll get a rise out of him."

As a theoretical explanation, providing semantically equivalent idioms in the target language, usually in different wording, is a last resort when dealing with cases such as those above where word-for-word translation of them would or might result in awkward and meaningless texts. On the other hand, the translator's decision elsewhere to opt for a

‘foreignising’ literal translation of unfamiliar idiomatic expressions in the target language is related to the principle of artistic integrity which insists on preserving both the substance (the facts) and the spirit of the source text, namely its style. Accordingly, the English translation studied here is positively rated by the standards of the approach advocated here. It reflects an awareness of the ways the text interacts with the worldview of its author.

The acquisition move is about fully comprehending the various aspects of the ‘message’, that is its spirit, substance and flavor’ (p54). In other words, the translator probes into more subtle factual details about events, places and characters, etc. which build up the literariness, symbolism and imagery of the novel. Laabi’s text is so full of symbolic events, places and characters that are inevitably at the heart of its metaphors. Though Laabi relatively tends to be rather straightforward in his narrative, there are instances of culture-specific symbolisms that require particular attention. These are mainly associated with the-day-to-day living of ordinary Moroccans.

The translator seems to have faced occasional challenges dealing with strictly Moroccan culture-specific expressions and their connotations. He even missed the point completely in his translation of a passage discussing the process of choosing a bride for the narrator’s brother. The narrator brings up a common saying among Moroccans that partners from a similar modest social background make a better marriage match. For some unknown reason, the translator mistranslates

‘**Un pauvre s’est marié avec une pauvre, et ils ont fichu la paix aux autres** (p.22)
as ‘
One poor person married another, and in doing so bothered everyone (p.22).

Similarly, a slang word also seems to have eluded him. The narrator’s mother recounts her defiant verbal act against the colonial soldiers whom she confronted with the insulting word ‘Toz’ sur vous. In neither of the two occasions the word occurred did the translator seem to apprehend the culture-specific meaning of the word. In a first case, he simply omitted it in the target text, whereas in the second he erroneously rendered

‘je dis à ces français, à leurs militaires, et ses goumiers: **Toz sur vous**. Et après qu’est qu’ils vont me faire ? Me couper la tête ?’ (p. 218),

As

‘[...] I have said to those Frenchmen and their soldiers and goumiers: **Shame on you!** After all, what would they have done to me? Cut off my head?’(p.150),

using as the equivalent of ‘Toz’ the expression (shame on you) which means a totally different thing.

A subsequent move after the full grasp of the original message is its reformulation in a manner of expression that would be perceived as natural to the target reader. This move entails an ‘empathetic re-creation’ whereby the translator ‘creates new imagery that may carry the closest possible message in the new environment’ and at the same time ‘finding ‘natural ways’ of expression with which native speakers communicate with each other’ (Di, 2003, p.84). Most important at this stage is that the translator frees himself from ‘the interference of the foreign language’ (p85). The dilemma of having to adhere to the original style and at the same time to the genius of the target language is resolved in terms of the communicative clue principle. Equivalent communicative clues, be they either at the level of phonology, lexis, or syntax, etc. are to be retrieved during an effective penetration move.

Laabi’s novel presents its translator with a number of formulae that required him to do some reformulation so as to ensure naturalness of expression. In one case, a character, speaking of his plan to go sightseeing, uses the typical expression

‘verdir nos yeux’,

Literally

‘green our eyes’ (p. 68).

If translated literally, this would make no sense to the English reader. Naffis-Sahely opts for **‘feast our eyes’** that approximates the manner of the original in that they both are actually deviant structures in French and English deployed to emphasize their orality (p. 49).

The same is true of the translation of

‘écouter mes os’,

Literally

‘listen to my bones, (p. 172) as **‘heed my bones’** (p. 119) for the same aforementioned reason.

However, there are also other less successful instances where a translator’s transition move neutralizes an emphatic aphorism in the original and replaces it with a paraphrase, thus weakening the forcefulness of an idea that was meant to be foregrounded. This was the case of the translation of the wise saying:

‘La main que tu ne peux pas couper, baise-la’ (p.17). This saying is commonly used in an impersonal form and is meant as a piece of general advice. For no obvious reason, the translator for a direct a command:

‘You must kiss the hand that you cannot cut off’ (p.14) that undermines the emphasis implied by the pre-positioned word ‘main’ (hand) and relegates a general wisdom to a mere piece of advice brought in a casual conversation.

This final move verifies the extent to which the end product has managed to ‘preserve the artistic integrity of the original text’ and sees if it is capable of generating on the target readers ‘an effect that approximates as closely as possible the effect the original message had on source text readers’ (Di, 2003, p54). As has been affirmed on many occasions before, no translation is perfect but striving for it is a core ethical principle. However, based on the above analysis through the three moves of the artistic integrity model, Naffis-Sahely appears to have produced a quality translation that treated with care the different artistic layers of Abdelatif Laabi’s text.

Laabi is the kind of author who has an awareness of what his stylistic choices are meant for. He is conscious that his inclination towards orality is intended to bring the foreign reader closer to the realm of Morocco’s language and culture through an authentic story recounted by an omnipresent narrator. This aspect is largely preserved in the English version. The few noted weaknesses, as has been shown, were mostly a result of occasional misjudgments about the possible effects and meanings of those linguistic items that are deeply rooted in the Moroccan cultural sphere.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION

Quality assessment is the concern of everyone involved in translation studies. It is perhaps what translation theory is all about. Generally, theorists, practitioners, translator trainers, students and readers expect and aspire to have at hand a set of explicit and tangible criteria to assess translated products. A multitude of translation quality assessment models have been devised, but none has ever managed to fulfill general applicability. Jin Di’s Artistic Integrity theory is proposed for the purpose of this study as a holistic model of assessment. With its multi-theoretical basis and four-step process of analysis, Artistic integrity provides a toolkit for maximizing faithfulness to both the text and its author. The model is distinctly built on a harmonious combination of philosophical hermeneutics, cognitive stylistics, relevance theory, and reader response theory. Significantly, the four-stage analysis of the text (i.e. penetration, acquisition, transition and presentation), makes it possible to deal in a rather systematic with every aspect of the literary text, namely its spirit, substance, overtone, flavor and imagery.

Irrespective of any qualitative findings, the study aims to throw light on this less-studied literature of the Maghreb, particularly in the Anglophone world. Translations of it are fortunately increasing but do seem to need guidance on how to best deal with the linguistic and cultural dynamics impacting the production of this literature.

This is a timely piece of research that comes to fill a serious gap in English-language body of knowledge about the Maghreb and its francophone literature. It is really a disturbing fact that very little has been written on this literature and even the novels translated so far are still hard to get. This could hopefully be an incentive for academics to further enquire into this literature, which really deserves more attention for its artistic merit.

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